

HOW TO BRUSH YOUR DOG'S TEETH

Dr. William Rosenblad

BRUSHING TEETH

Dental disease (especially periodontal disease) is the most common disease in our canine companions. It is also one of the most preventable and treatable diseases. Fortunately, we can reduce or even prevent dental disease by feeding a crunchy diet, appropriate chew treats and toys and daily tooth brushing. The following are steps to guide you on how to brush your dog's teeth:

- The first step is to start with a clean, healthy mouth. Good dental hygiene should start with a young pet with healthy new teeth and gums, or after your pet has had a professional dental cleaning.
- You will need a soft-bristled tooth brush and veterinary toothpaste. **Human toothpastes and baking soda may cause problems.** Furthermore, veterinary toothpastes have flavors that are appealing to dogs. Anything other than a bristled tooth brush will not get below the gum line, which is the most important area to brush.
- There are several important facts about our pets' mouths that tell us when, where and how to brush. Periodontal disease usually affects the upper, back teeth first and worst. Plaque builds up on the tooth surface daily, especially just under the gum line. It takes less than 36 hours for this plaque to become mineralized and harden into "tartar" (calculus) that cannot be removed with a brush. Because of this progression, brushing should be done daily, with a brush to remove the plaque from under the gum line.
- Pick a time of day that will become a convenient part of your pet's daily routine. Just before a walk or before a daily treat can help your pet actually look forward to brushing time. Take a few days to let both of you get use to the process. Follow with praise and a walk or treat each time.
- Start by offering your dog a taste of the veterinary toothpaste. The next time, let him taste the toothpaste, then run your finger along the gums of the upper teeth. Repeat the process with the tooth brush. Get the bristles of the brush along the gum line of the upper back teeth and angle slightly up, so the bristles get under the gum line. Work from back to front, making small circles along the gum lines. It should take you less than 30 seconds to brush your pet's teeth. Do not try to brush the entire mouth at first. If all that your pet lets you brush is the outside of the upper teeth, you are still addressing the most important area of periodontal disease – prevention. If your pet eventually allows you to brush most of his teeth, so much the better.
- Even with the best tooth brushing, some dogs may still need an occasional professional cleaning, just like humans. By brushing your pet's teeth daily and curtailing the amount of periodontal disease, you may reduce the frequency and involvement of dental cleanings and provide your pet with a healthier, sweeter smile.